

## **Will you put up a “Children at Play” sign?**

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Children are vulnerable members of our communities. When they play outdoors we want to protect them. One of the dangers is traffic. Parents sometimes compensate for fear that their child may be hit by asking for “Children at Play” signs. Parents often feel that these signs will protect their children when they are playing on or near streets and roads.

Sadly these signs do little to protect children. In fact, they give parents and children a false sense of security. That’s why you will almost always be told “no”.

If we install “Children at Play” signs along public roadways, we would be giving the wrong message; that it is all right if children play in the street. There is no sign that will protect a child when drivers are not paying attention, distracted, or speeding to make up for getting caught at the last signal. A street is a hazardous place for children to play... period!

State laws require that city and county engineers follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The MUTCD is published by the Federal Highway Administration to provide consistency for road signs and markings. That is important so drivers will easily recognize signs and, no matter where they drive, respond correctly. We also know how drivers usually react to signs.

The “Children at Play” sign has little effect on a driver’s actions. It may even have a harmful effect for parents and children. Parents think that with a sign, they don’t need to watch their children as closely. Drivers who see the sign find that most of the time there are no children around. As a result, they usually ignore the sign after a very short time. For that reason the “Children at Play” sign is not in the MUTCD.

There is a proven way to prevent death and injury to children from vehicles. It is for parents and teachers to teach them discipline and to stay away from traffic. No sign can take the place of watchful, disciplined children, attentive parents and teachers, and prudent drivers.

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Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at [Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov](mailto:Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov).